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Technology-Rich Learning Pages 7-7

Perspectives / Playing Catch Up with Kids

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I recently sat down with a colleague who is the mother of four children, all under age 11. The topic was technology—how her children use it at home and school, their attitudes toward it, and what she hopes they will gain from it.

Her oldest, Sam, who gets straight As and plays travel soccer, is immersed in using the family's interactive play stations to practice soccer, skiing, and guitar. Sam also likes to buy and load his own books on an e-reader. And he enjoys his new Nintendo system, which allows him to compete with other players remotely. Because his mom regards Nintendo as a gateway to social media, she made Sam wait until he was 10 before getting it and she monitors his usage.

Meanwhile, Seth, 7, and Sarah, 5, have their own interests. Seth, who likes taking things apart, is fascinated with "LittleBigPlanet," in which players must solve puzzles to protect the world from monster machines. Sarah, who gravitates toward art, frequently clicks into programs that allow her to create three-dimensional images and to mix and match colors.

Sam, Seth, and Sarah have all been drilled on the family rules: always ask to use any device; no screen time (including TV) on school nights; no purchases or downloading without permission; share games with siblings; and on family trips, spend *some* time looking out the window.

Youngest daughter Sydney, 2, however, is another story. Sydney sees technology, in the words of her mother, as "kiddie crack." Sydney has been swiping her mom's iPad since she was 15 months old and has recently realized that Mom's smartphone can be just as empowering. She loves taking photographs: knees, blank walls, the cat. Animal lover that she is, when she is not pretending to eat, purr, and walk like a cat, Sydney has found all things Diego to be mesmerizing. Diego's exploits as animal rescuer have introduced Sydney to an advanced store of information about Beluga whales, jaguars, and a zoo of other animals. It's not all good news, Mom says: Sydney has been known to throw tantrums if wi-fi is not available.

When it comes to computer use at school, however, the three older children mostly read online books or access programs that teach vocabulary or math skills. Thus far, they've only dabbled with using technology for writing, doing research, or creating projects. Their school did send home a memo during the holiday break suggesting that if families were buying gifts for their children, they should consider purchasing e-readers and tablets that kids could bring to school because a technology-rich learning plan is in development. Hearing this, I couldn't help but hope that the schools have their plan in place before Sydney gets to school.

One of the disquieting messages of the articles in this issue is that classroom use of technology is not keeping up

with the kids' usage at home, where they are both teaching themselves how to use technology and learning to follow their interests online. The reasons for the gap between home and school are numerous, from lack of resources in schools, to a lack of technology skills among teachers, to a school culture that asks kids to check their technology at the door.

The reason for the latter policy often reflects legitimate but troubling fears. As Will Richardson (p. 10) noted in a recent webinar, educators too frequently associate technology with potential trouble. "Flip the risk," he urged, because "no technology use equals *more* trouble. ... You can't close your door to an overabundance of information."

This issue of *Educational Leadership* marks the eighth issue that *EL* has dedicated to technology. (The first with the word "technology" in the title was [published in 1968](#).) As the editors read through submissions, we found the articles fell into several categories: essays from futurists who believe schools are neglecting the revolutionary potential of technology on learning (pp. 10, 22); articles from groundbreaking educators who are experimenting with new student-centered approaches like flipped learning and video screencasts (pp. 16, 28, 84); reports on research and the lack thereof when it comes to knowing what works best for students (pp. 32, 44, 78); and, finally, many articles from educators who are trying to weave tradition and technology into what Catlin R. Tucker (p. 57) calls "a durable education fabric."

What the mother who spoke with me wants schools to teach about technology is probably what most parents want: "I want my kids to follow their interests and go beyond those interests. Mostly I want them to learn to think and not let things think for them."

It's time to stop playing catch up with the kids and start leading the way with learning-rich technology.

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